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EMERGENCY

STRATEGY & LEADERSHIP IN CRITICAL

MANAGEMENT

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inside:

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FIRST LINE OF RESPONSE
PLAGUED BY OUTDATED
TECHNOLOGY, LACK
OF STANDARDS

911:

A NATIONAL PLIGHT?

The Ocean Rescue II scans the hulls of ships entering the port complex and can detect traces of weapons of mass destruction. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department



High-Tech

Port Pro



Los Angeles port
authorities bolster
line of **defense**
against terrorists
with technology and
a specialized canine.

On paper, it reads like a prop list for a high-budget, futuristic action thriller: a \$3 million high-tech screening ship, a radiation-detecting helicopter and a badge-carrying Labrador retriever who can sniff out chemical and biological weapons.

But this is no movie. At the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex, these tactical tools are the latest in artillery aimed to prevent weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from infiltrating the critical infrastructure facility, where 40 percent of all U.S. imports enter the country. How critical is this port complex? Consider this: If an incident forced the port complex to close, it would cost the U.S. economy about \$1 billion a day, said Jack Ewell, who oversees the port security project for the L.A. Sheriff's Department.

"That would flat-out cripple the economy if all of these agencies weren't working together to ensure the safety of that complex," he said. "We want to stop anything that may be illicit before it gets in the port."

BY RUSSELL NICHOLS, STAFF WRITER

tection

With cutting-edge detection technology, officials said, this project has upgraded collaboration between participating agencies, such as the U.S. Coast Guard, local law enforcement, public safety and the port police, and has enhanced security at the nation's busiest container port.

"It's a critical tool for us ensuring that we're safe against the threat of terrorism," said L.A. Port Police Chief Ron Boyd. "When it comes to detecting the threat, part of what you do is go out there and show the would-be attacker that you're ready."

Tools of the Trade

To prevent potential terrorist attacks, port officials launched the 55-foot screening vessel — the first of its kind in the world — armed

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with the most advanced technology available. Called the Ocean Rescue II, the vessel can scan the hulls of ships entering the port complex, detect traces of WMD materials and transmit real-time data to land-based labs. The vessel also holds medical and disaster response equipment, an advanced sonar system that can detect threats in zero-visibility waters, and a rover that can dive to 3,000 feet.

The detection process didn't work this way in the past. Even with portable bomb-detection equipment, Ewell said, port authorities


had no remote screening system, no chemical and biological detection tools, and couldn't send real-time information back to the Sheriff's Department's hazardous-materials detail headquarters.

"Technology advances happen daily, and this equipment just did not exist years ago," he said. "All of the agencies involved are constantly looking for what's new. If you're standing still, you're going backward."

The combination of security resources really optimizes the effort, he added. The Eurocopter



The Eurocopter AS350 B2 helicopter's advanced radiation-detection pod lets authorities screen ships from above. Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department



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2010 Port Funding

The Port Security Grant Program saw a decrease of \$100 million for fiscal 2010 from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security compared with 2009's funds. The program received \$288 million for the protection of critical port infrastructure from terrorism for fiscal 2010. According to FEMA, the "funds are primarily intended to assist ports in enhancing maritime domain awareness, enhancing risk management capabilities to prevent, detect, respond to and recover from attacks involving improvised explosive devices, chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive and other nonconventional weapons, as well as training and exercises."

AS350 B2 helicopter's advanced radiation-detection pod, worth \$220,000, lets authorities screen ships from above.

But adoption doesn't happen overnight. The technology, Boyd said, must be folded into each agency's concept of operations. Not only that, but it must also be maintained, he said, otherwise it's like having a Rolls-Royce in your driveway that doesn't work and you're still paying the car note and insurance.

"It increases your responsibility," he said. "Now that you've spent all this money, you must make sure you're maintaining the detection equipment correctly. We must make sure that after we've gotten proficient, these things don't break down and we suddenly have nowhere to go."

HAZMAT Dog Fights Terrorism

At 19 months old, Johnny Ringo is a badge-carrying black Labrador retriever, and the latest — and furriest — counterterrorism fighter for the L.A. County Sheriff's Department's Hazardous Materials Operations. And he's unique with a nose keen enough to sniff out anthrax and other chemical and biological WMDs.

Since joining the force in January 2010, Johnny Ringo has been sniffing his way around urban facilities for sweeps, planned events and big venues, such as the Rose Bowl and Golden Globe Awards.

"It's not hard to detect chemical and biological weapons once they're dispersed," said Detective Wayne Carpini, the dog's handler. "He's the only dog that can detect something before it goes off."

The dog was named after the notorious gunslinger of the Old West, known as "the King of the Cowboys." But the happy-go-lucky canine aims to serve to protect: His ability makes him an invaluable asset to the L.A. Port complex.

But this is all new territory for Johnny Ringo. Originally from Holland, he was brought to America by Work Dogs International, a Banning, Calif.-based company that raises and trains canine security assets.

The specialized dog spent six weeks at a lab in Austin, Texas, where Carpini trained his nose to track scents and odors in chemical and biological agents related to WMDs. No other dog in the world does what he does, mainly because of the nature of the job.

"One of the biggest concerns is if a dog smells anthrax, then the dog and handlers are dead,"



Johnny Ringo, a Labrador retriever, and Detective Wayne Carpini work as a team to detect chemical and biological weapons. Photo courtesy of Detective Wayne Carpini

“It’s not hard to detect chemical and biological weapons once they’re dispersed. He’s the only dog that can detect something before it goes off.”

— Wayne Carpini, detective, Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department

said Patrick Beltz, Work Dogs International’s chief instructor, who named the canine detective. “But dogs find heroin and cocaine daily and nobody overdoses.”

But, Beltz predicts, more WMD-sniffing canines will come on the scene in the next few years as authorities realize the potential of a dog that can detect toxins at ports of call, airports and waterways — a skill that requires constant training.

Carpini works to keep Johnny Ringo’s skills sharp. “Every day I come to work, I run him on scents and odors, search him long and search him short,” he said.

When off duty, Johnny Ringo goes home with Carpini, who lives on a two-acre plot just outside of Los Angeles County. Unfortunately not enough people know about the dog yet, so his services haven’t been utilized as much as they could be.

“I had people who watched the Super Bowl asking, ‘How come your dog’s not there?’” Carpini said. “I said ‘It’s not me. I don’t make this call.’”

Many Agencies, One Mission

The Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex is a Venn diagram of federal, state and local government jurisdictions. From the U.S. Coast Guard to local law enforcement and public safety departments, multiple agencies contribute to operations at the port. While new technology helps streamline the port security process, the first layer of defense is communication.

“We all have our own turf and interests,” said Boyd, “but we take the time to meet with each other and iron things out to make sure we’re not stepping on toes.”

The agencies have worked together for years, Ewell said, developing a comprehensive,



Los Angeles sheriff’s officers prepare Johnny Ringo for duty. Photo courtesy of Detective Wayne Carpini

layered approach to security — especially in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The screening vessel was acquired by the Sheriff’s Department, but this latest program came about as a joint effort, paid for by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

“When you have everyone on the same page, the idea is that you can lessen the impact on maritime commerce and improve the ability to keep us safe by bringing resources together,” said Lt. j.g. Tyler Stutin, a spokesman for the U.S. Coast Guard. “It’s all about working together in this day and age more than ever.” +